

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BELIZE 00384 152347Z
ACTION SS-25

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AMEMBASSY GUATAMALA IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T BELIZE 0384

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR BH UK GT MX
SUBJECT: BELIZE DISPUTE

REF: A) STATE 128822;
B) BELIZE 0373
C) GUATEMALA 3723

1. PERMANENT SECRETARY FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS IN GOVERNOR'S OFFICE IS RELIABLY REPORTED TO HAVE LET SLIP IN INFORMAL CONVERSATION THAT TARGET DATE FOR BELIZE'S INDEPENDENCE, AS HE UNDERSTANDS IT, IS JANUARY 1978. (PLEASE HOLD SOURCE CLOSELY, AS WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER OR NOT REMARK WAS INADVERTENT.) PERMSEC ALSO MENTIONED UK DEFINITELY EXPECTS TROUBLE WITH GUATEMALA IN NEAR FUTURE. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE IN BELMOPAN GIVES APPEARANCE OF BEING HARRIED AND SWAMPED WITH ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS -- E. G., PLEADING PRESSURES OF WORK COMMUNICATOR HAS HAD TO CANCEL JUNE 15 LUNCHEON WHICH WIFE OF CONGEN PRINCIPAL OFFICER WAS TO ATTEND.

2. PERSISTENT AND FREELY VOICED PRIVATE COMMENT BY OFFICERS OF
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BRITISH FORCES REINFORCE UK EXPECTATION OF TROUBLE, AND THEY CONTINUE TO CITE EARLY JULY AS TIME IT WILL COME. MILITARY PARTICULARLY STIRRED UP BY LANGUAGE IN GUATEMALAN PRESIDENT LAUGERUD'S JUNE 12 COMMUNIQUE TO GUATEMALAN NATION. BRITISH FORCES, HOWEVER, TEND TO EXPECT CRISIS EACH TIME UK-GUATEMALA TALKS ARE HELD, AND, ALTHOUGH THEY SOUND GRIMMER THIS TIME, THERE APPEARS TO BE NO EXTREME ALERT OR SERIOUS EVIDENCE OF CRASH MILITARY PREPARATIONS.

3. LOCAL PRESS, SUCH AS IT IS, IS HAVING FIELD DAY WITH INDEPENDENCE QUESTION. COMBINATION OF ANNOUNCEMENT OF JULY TALKS IN WASHINGTON AND PREMIER PRICE'S TRIP TO LONDON FOR COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE HAS PROVOKED HEAVIEST PLAY THIS ISSUE HAS RECEIVED IN OVER A YEAR. SILLIEST OF THE LOT IS JUNE EDITION OF "PEOPLE'S VOICE", MONTHLY TABLOID OF GOVERNING PEOPLE'S UNITED PARTY, WHICH DEVOTES ENTIRE FRONT PAGE TO REPRINT OF UNDATED MIAMI HERALD ARTICLE WITH HEADLINE: "WILL U. S. TROOPS BE SENT TO PROTECT BELIZE?" CENTERED WITHIN ARTICLE IS REPRODUCTION OF BELIZEAN FLAG AND WORDS "BELIZE" AND "INDEPENDENCE", SURROUNDED BY INTERCONNECTED PHOTOGRAPHS OF PREMIER PRICE, PANAMA'S OMAR TORRIJOS, MEXICAN PRESIDENT LOPEZ PORTILLO, AND PRESIDENT CARTER. OBVIOUS, BUT UNSTATED PITCH FOR PRICE'S VARIOUS INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING SNHEMES IS REPAATED ON INSIDE PAGES WITH SECOND SET OF PHOTOGRAPHS.

4. THE BEACON, MOUTHPIECE FOR OPPOSITION UNITED DEMOCRATIC PARTY, ATTACKS PRICE FOR PUTTING CART BEFORE HORSE, ACCUSING PREMIER OF SEEKING INDEPENDENCE ABSTRACTLY AND OBSESSIVELY WITHOUT ATTENTION TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT REQUISITE FOR FULL SOVEREIGNTY. BEACON SUGGESTS THAT PREMIER AND BELIZE WOULD DO BETTER TO CONCENTRATE ENERGIES ON DEVELOPMENT AND WORRY ABOUT INDEPENDENCE LATER.

5. THE REPORTER, INDEPENDENT OPPOSITION WEEKLY AND BEST OF LOCAL JOURNALISTIC EFFORTS, HAS COME OUT CATEGORICALLY AGAINST "ANY FORM OF INDEPENDENCE PRIOR TO NEW GENERAL ELECTIONS". REPORTER HAS PICKED UP ON REPORTED STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN AT COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE TO EFFECT THAT UK WILL SIGN NO AGREEMENT RE BELIZE WITHOUT FIRST CONSULTING GOB AND PEOPLE OF BELIZE. FRONT SECRET

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PAGE ARTICLE TRANSLATES THIS AS SUBTLE CHANGE IN WORDING OF HMG'S PREVIOUS POSITION WHICH WOULD NOW RULE OUT POSSIBILITY OF UDI AND WOULD REQUIRE MANDATE OF BELIZEAN PEOPLE, THROUGH REFERENDUM OR NATIONAL ELECTIONS, BEFORE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE. ENSUING EDITORIAL TAKES IT FROM THERE, IMPUGNING COMPETENCE AND INTEGRITY OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION AND CALLING FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS BEFORE MOVE TO INDEPENDENCE.

6. COMMENT: NONE OF THIS SEEMS TO HAVE AROUSED MUCH GENERAL INTEREST THUS FAR. BRITISH ARE RESTRICTING EXPRESSION OF THEIR WORRIES FOR MOST PART TO THEMSELVES, AND GOVERNOR MCENTEE IS PASSING OFF INTENSE ACTIVITY OF HIS OFFICE AS UNDERSTANDABLE REACTION TO JUNE 12 GUATEMALAN COMMUNIQUE. PRESS FLURRY VERY LIKELY HAS STIRRED UP FEW BELIZEANS OUTSIDE OF GOB AND PRESS ITSELF; IT CAN BE EXPECTED DEGENERATE INTO CHARGES OF TREASON ON ONE HAND, STUPIDITY AND DECEPTION ON THE OTHER. AS WE HAVE REPORTED BEFORE, INDEPENDENCE IS NOT BURNING POPULAR ISSUE HERE -- MANY ARE CONTENT WITH STATUS QUO AND APATHY IS NOTEWORTHY. HOWEVER, CONTINUED PRESS PLAY WOULD SERVE KEEP ISSUE BEFORE PUBLIC AND PROBABLY WOULD EVEN-

TUALLY GENERATE CONSIDERABLE ENTHUSIASM IN SOME AND APPREHENSION
IN OTHERS. ANY PATENT NERVOUSNESS OR OBVIOUS HURRY-UP PREPARATIONS
ON PART OF BRITISH FORCES WOULD CHANGE THIS READING DRASTICALLY AND
RAPIDLY, BUT STRESS HOWEVER, THAT THIS HAS NOT BEEN OBSERVED,
NOR ARE THERE SIGNS IT WILL BE SHORT OF MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS.
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